2019-20 DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Evaluation of Early Learning Initiatives

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goals of the Early Learning department are to improve kindergarten (K) readiness and to ensure that all students are reading on grade level by the end of grade two. The budget for the department in 2019-20 was $22,309,917, an increase from last year ($19,694,012).

The purpose of this report is to summarize the 2019-20 context, process, and outcomes of the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) Early Learning initiatives.[1] Contextual information about the services provided to children from birth through grade two was gathered through review of internal documents and interviews with Early Learning central staff members. Process information was examined through analyses of the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (*CLASS*) and an early learning teacher survey. The evaluation also included analyses of K readiness and student academic achievement data through grade two, when available.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all Dallas ISD campuses transitioned to at-home learning as of March 23, 2020. As most End-of-Year (EOY) assessments were canceled, evaluation questions relating to those assessments were omitted from the report.[2] After the transition, the department supported district families by creating daily lessons aligned with the district curriculum for families to work through with their prekindergarten (PK) through grade-two students.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What was the context of the Early Learning programs and the related 2019-20 initiatives?

The first Early Learning department goal was increasing K readiness through the provision of educational services to children from birth to age five through the expansion of the PK program. The second was to ensure that all students were reading on grade level by the end of grade two. Thus, early learning staff members endeavored to increase demand for and access to PK through increased enrollment, extend the continuum of care through community resources to support children from birth, increase classroom quality, and support reading and language acquisition in K and beyond.

To increase access and demand through enrollment, the district continued to add partner sites; the number of PK partnerships increased from 27 in 2017-18, to 32 in 2018-19, and to 37 in 2019-20.[3] Early learning staff members fostered community partnerships with Commit![4] and PK partnership sites. To expand the continuum of care, students from birth to age five could also receive services through the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)[5] program and AVANCE.[6] The district also worked with Stand for Children to provide families with the opportunity to receive home visits through the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project.

To improve classroom quality, the Early Learning department continued using PK and K through grade-two specialists. Specialists provided individual support for teachers. The district employed 37 PK specialists, 53 K through grade-two specialists, 16 campus lead specialists, and six floating specialists.[7] Specialists participated in professional development (PD) programs and then provided teachers with training.[8] Department staff members also provided 2019 summer PD for PK through grade-two teachers through the Personalized Professional Learning and Development (P2LD) program. Additionally, the Early Learning department provided training for teachers in PK partnership sites and for teaching assistants.

Another attempt to improve quality was a focus on assessing student-teacher interactions. The *CLASS*,[9] an observation instrument, was administered by Southern Methodist University (SMU) to measure the quality of teacher-student interactions.

Finally, to ensure that students were reading on grade level, there was an increased focus on reading and language acquisition. Department staff continued to revise instructional materials and related curricula based on the

[1] Detailed methodologies are available in the full report. Portions of this report have been adapted from Hinkley and Rowles (2019).
[2] *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness* (*STAAR*), *TerraNova*, *SUPERA*, and End of Year (EOY) *Istation's Indicators of Progress* (*ISIP*), *Measures of Academic Progress* (*MAP*), and *Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment* (*TX-KEA*) were intended to be used as measures of student achievement for the 2019-20 school year, but these assessments were canceled after the transition to at-home learning. Early Learning reports prior to this year contain these data.
[3] As of January 2020. Dallas ISD teachers taught students in all settings.
[4] For more information, see http://commit2dallas.org/.
[5] For more information, see Tyree (2020).
[6] For more information, see https://avance-dallas.org/.
[7] As of January 2020. In 2019-20, all PK classrooms had a specialist. In January 2020, 28 of the K through grade-two specialists were moved from schools rated as Breakthrough in the Local Accountability System to three of the lowest performing schools until the transition to at-home learning. After the transition to at-home learning, specialists checked on teachers and answered questions, but they did not continue to coach teachers.
[8] A list of training given to and provided by specialists is available in the full report.
[9] For more information, see http://teachstone.com/classroom-assessment-scoring-system/.

new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Teachers also continued to receive specialist coaching and other reading-related PD.

What were the characteristics and continuous enrollment rates of early learning students?

In 2019-20, 45,549 students enrolled in early childhood (EC) education through grade two, a decline from 46,457 in 2018-19. A similar pattern of decline was observed in K (10,992 in 2018-19 to 10,938 in 2019-20). Over half of the students were male (52%) and/or Hispanic (68%), and most were economically disadvantaged (89%). English learners comprised 49 percent of students. Seventy-seven percent of students who attended Dallas ISD PK in 2018-19 returned to Dallas ISD for K in 2019-20. This means that almost a quarter of 2018-19 PK students did not remain in the district in 2019-20. Sixty-nine percent of students were continuously enrolled from 2016-17 (their K year) to 2019-20 (most students' grade-three year).

What were the early learning teacher effectiveness ratings?

Sixty-seven percent of all early learning teachers (EC through grade two) received a 2018-19 Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI) effectiveness level of Proficient I or above.[10] The percentages of teachers rated Proficient I or above for each grade level were as follows: 69 percent for PK, 66 percent for K, 63 percent for grade one, and 68 percent for grade two.

What were the teacher perceptions of the early learning specialists?

Early learning teachers were surveyed about their perceptions of the specialists. The response rate for early learning teachers was 59 percent. Overall, PK survey respondents were satisfied with the professionalism of their specialists (96%), the quality of support they received from their specialists (91% to 93%), and the services provided by their specialists overall (89%). The most-cited successes were idea generation and brainstorming (n = 45), observation and feedback (n = 40), and specialists providing quick and consistent responses to teacher needs and being willing to help teachers (for both, n = 36). The most commonly cited challenges were scheduling and availability of the specialists (n = 40) and time limitations of both the specialists and teachers (n = 20).

K through grade-two survey respondents were satisfied with the professionalism of their specialists (93%), the quality of support they received from their specialists (87% to 92%), and the services provided by their specialists overall (85%). The most-cited successes were specialists providing materials and resources (n = 54), providing hands-on help with classroom organization and set up (n = 27), and the general support provided by the specialist and observation and feedback (for both, n = 26). The most commonly cited challenges were lack of consistency in specialists (i.e., changing specialists midyear; n = 45), scheduling and availability of specialists (n = 37), and time limitations of both the specialists and teachers (n = 26).

What was the quality of early learning instruction as measured by *CLASS*?

Consistent with the last three years, overall results of *CLASS* indicated that district teachers were strongest in emotional support (98% of PK teachers and 87% of K though grade-two teachers met the threshold in spring 2020, respectively) and classroom organization (93% of PK teachers and 86% of K though grade-two teachers) and weakest in instructional support (60% of PK teachers and 54% of K though grade-two teachers). Even so, the percentage of teachers who met or exceeded quality thresholds trended upward from fall 2019 to spring 2020 for all three domains and overall for PK. For K through grade-two teachers there was a slight increase overall with mixed results in trends for domains. When reviewed overall and by grade, the average scores of the observed teachers were at or above the quality thresholds for both semesters on all three domains (emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support).

In spring 2020, 59 percent of PK teachers and 51 percent of K through grade-two teachers met or exceeded the quality threshold in all three domains.[11] Compared to spring 2018 and 2019, increased percentages of teachers met or exceeded the quality threshold overall and for all three domains in 2020.

How did early learning student scores change throughout the 2019-20 school year?

Early learning students participated in several assessments in 2019-20. For K readiness, 8,857 students took the Literacy Reading domain of *TX-KEA;* 72 percent scored *On Track,* indicating they were K ready, a slight increase from 2018-19 (70%). A higher percentage of Dallas ISD (DISD) PK students (78%) were K ready than No DISD PK students (41%). Even so, about a fifth (22%) of DISD PK students did not meet the K Ready standard on *TX-KEA*.

More K students than grade-one and grade-two students scored at or above grade level at MOY (Table 1). The majority of K students met the MOY grade-level standard on *TX-KEA* reading (75%) and mathematics (65%). In contrast, between 31 and 49 percent met the MOY standards on grade-one *ISIP* (44%), grade-two *ISIP* (48%), *MAP* reading (49%), and *MAP* mathematics (31%).

[10] For more information on TEI, see the 2018-19 report (Barton, 2020). TEI scores are typically reported in the fall for the prior school year, thus, 2018-19 scores are examined in the 2019-20 report.

[11] SMU conducted *CLASS* observations from January 2020 until 03/12/20; the data were incomplete because of the transition to at-home learning and results should be reviewed with caution.

When scores from BOY to MOY were examined, the percentage of K students scoring at or above grade level increased from BOY to MOY on *TX-KEA* reading (61% to 75%) and mathematics (49% to 65%), whereas results were the same for grade-one *ISIP* (44%) and about the same for grade-two *ISIP* (49% to 48%). In comparison to 2018-19, the percentages of K students meeting the standards for BOY *TX-KEA* vocabulary and mathematics were lower in 2019-20. For grades one and two, the percentages of students meeting the standards for *ISIP* were lower in 2019-20 than in 2018-19 at both BOY and MOY.

Table 1: 2018-19 and 2019-20 Percentage of Students Performing At or Above Grade Level on Reading and Mathematics Assessments by Grade

	BOY		MOY		EOY	
Exam	2018-19 %	2019-20 %	2018-19 %	2019-20 %	2018-19 %	2019-20 %
K						
TX-KEA-V	70	61		75		
TX-KEA-M	67	49		65		
Grade One*						
ISIP	49	44	48	44	55	
Grade Two						
ISIP	54	49	53	48	55	
MAP-R		46		49		
MAP-M		36		31		

Source: PEIMS district database: 10/26/18 (2018-19) and 10/31/19 (2019-20). *TX-KEA*: 05/13/20 (2018-19 BOY) and 02/13/20 (2019-20 BOY and MOY). *ISIP*: 11/05/18 (2018-19 BOY), 02/04/19 (2018-19 MOY), 06/05/19 (2018-19 EOY), 11/01/19 (2019-20 BOY), and 02/05/20 (2019-20 MOY). *MAP*: 02/11/20 (2019-20 BOY and MOY). None of these assessments were given at EOY in 2019-20.
Note: V = the vocabulary subscale of *TX-KEA,* a component of the reading assessment given over time. M = mathematics. R = the reading subscale of *MAP*. * no multi-administration mathematics assessment was administered in grade one in 2018-19 or 2019-20. Grey = the assessment was not administered in that timeframe. *MAP* scores are only reported for the 2-5 version of the assessment here.

CIRCLE scores varied by domain. The percentage of PK students scoring *On Track* on the Phonological Awareness domain of *CIRCLE* were 69 percent (wave 1) and 79 percent (wave 2). On the Rapid Vocabulary domain, percentages were 47 (wave 1) and 61 (wave 2) percent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue efforts to retain Dallas ISD PK students in the district. Twenty-three percent of 2017-18 and 2018-19 PK students did not remain in the district the following year for K. Efforts to increase enrollment (partnership sites, teacher home visits, etc.) should continue.

Continue to implement the early learning initiatives with a focus on language and literacy development. The percentage of students scoring at or above grade level on *TX-KEA* vocabulary and mathematics and *ISIP* declined from 2018-19 to 2019-20 for students in grades K to two. The Early Learning department should continue its focus on increasing K readiness and ensuring students are reading on grade level by the end of grade two. In particular, the district should continue increasing K readiness by increasing access to and the quality of PK. Like previous years, a higher percentage of students who attended Dallas ISD PK (78%) were K ready in comparison to those who did not attend (41%).

Continue to train teachers to provide more effective instructional support for students. Overall, the district performed well on *CLASS* with an upward trend in scores over time; however, 40 percent of PK teachers and 46 percent of K to grade-two teachers did not meet the quality threshold for instructional support in spring 2020. Thus, the department should continue efforts to improve these scores.

REFERENCES

Barton, M. (2020). 2018-19 Evaluation of the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI). Dallas, TX. Dallas Independent School District.

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Danielle Tyree, Ph.D., Evaluation Analyst I **Sarah Hinkley, Ph.D., Program Evaluation Manager**

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Dallas ISD Department of Evaluation and Assessment; H. B. Bell School Support Center; 2909 Buckner Blvd.; Box10; Dallas, TX 75228

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For more information, please contact Program Evaluation at evaluation@dallasisd.org.